THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

AND OTHER POEMS

SIR WILLIAM WATSON

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BY

SIR WILLIAM WATSON

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PREFACE

To prevent even a possibility of misunderstanding, it seems best to indicate briefly here the precise extent of my indebtedness, in *The Superhuman Antagonists*, to ancient Persian mythology. It is soon stated. I have borrowed from that mythology its fundamental idea : the idea of a world ruled by two mutually hostile beings, Ormazd and Ahriman, the Good and the Evil Spirit : and I have brought into my story, with sufficient modification of their native attributes, three of the many divinities or demigods who in the Zend-Avesta are pictured as revolving about the central figure of Ormazd, the all-beneficent. That is the full account of my obligation.

The narrative which I have woven around these personages is my own invention, and the credit or discredit of it must be borne solely by me. Moreover, while drawing upon the plentiful if somewhat unchastened resources of this Mid-Eastern Pantheon to the extent here stated, I have not, where only its minor elements are concerned, bound myself to any scrupulous observance of its constitution or composition. Its cardinal and governing conception is of profound and imposing significance, but its incidental features have not the same grandeur, and with regard to these I have used such liberty as the traditional prerogative of the Poet seemed to sanction. Perhaps I ought to add, that while adopting for my purposes, in its main general outline, an archaic creed, I have not thought it necessary to hamper myself with a primitive cos-

mography, preferring to accept as a framework the verified Universe in which fancy, after all, has liberal room for play.

In the word *Ormazd* I have chosen the form favoured by the most modern scholarship, in preference to others heretofore current; not that I am competent to hold any opinion as to its relative accuracy, but because in point of sound it seems to commend itself better to English ears.

And now I take occasion to say, with what the reader may if he choose call egotism, that this poem, whatever it achieves, at any rate attempts no mean or slight things; and though I have written it in about six hundred lines, it could perhaps have been written more easily and more quickly in twice or thrice that number. A few months hence it will be just forty years since I carried to a then pro-

minent publisher, since deceased, the manuscript of my first book. *The Prince's Quest* was written in the same metre as *The Superhuman Antagonists*: both belong to the region of fantasy: but in methods of workmanship, as well as in those matters which lie nearer to the springs of thought and feeling, they are perhaps as little related as any two productions from the same hand and brain could be. Forty years, as I have said, separate them: forty years of a far from bookish life, in which I have seen something of many countries, have counted among my friends many famous persons, have known very varied fortunes, have had memorable and great experiences, and have lived intensely through much peace and war. Yet at the end of these four decades, and in the poem now being put forth—a poem written with un-

hasty pen, mainly among the majestic English mountains, partly on the lovely Irish coast, with my young children growing beside me as it grew —I find myself once more dwelling in an atmosphere of romantic idealism akin to optimistic faith. It is an atmosphere which to some eyes may seem to take on illusive colours, but it has at all events nothing in it that can deaden or enervate, and while it does not chill, neither does it fever. Perhaps it may sometimes even brace and hearten, and to do so is surely Poetry's own noblest office. For Poetry should without doubt gratify the sense, but it should also fortify the soul, and the degree in which it harmonises these functions and performs them with power is the measure of its true and enduring worth.

A word as to the lesser poems in this volume. Most of them have

already appeared in reviews, magazines or the daily press. The poem acclaiming America's intervention in the war, and the one in which Ireland's mood of detachment from that struggle is lamented, were first published when their respective themes were engaging general attention. They are now reprinted without essential change.

W. W.

April 1919.

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THE SUPERHUMAN ANTAGONISTS

ORMAZD, the Spirit of Light, the Spirit of Good,
Their father, glorying in his fatherhood—
Maker of Joy, and of all blissful things—
Once, in mid pomp of his world-journeyings
Across the invisible viaducts of Space
That lead from star to star, came face to face
With him from whom all Guilt, all Error known,
All that is misbegotten or misgrown,

Pain without ease, toil without wage or end,
And sin without delight, darkly descend:
Him in whom falsehood and curst greed began:
Evil's great founder, loveless Ahriman.

For he too had roamed forth that day, the sire
Of the world's tears; and bringing spectres dire
To attend him, Hates and Lusts of every hue,
He, as it chanced, with all his retinue,
Far roving from his cavernous abode,
Travelled that selfsame interstellar road,
That crosses the calm vasts, and runs unseen
Through the hushed voids, and spans the deeps serene.

A secret highway, it was made of old,
Long ere the passions of the moon were cold,
Though in no chart of heaven 'tis figured yet:
And on that road the mighty rivals met.

Then did they pause: then did all Good and Ill
Seem for a moment to stand mute and still.
And as a thundercloud, a wandering gloom,
Full of the whirlwind, full of sudden doom,
Might hover, holding back its bolts unflung,
So hovered Ahriman. But apt of tongue,
Quickly he scabbarded fierce hate in guile,
And hailed bright Ormazd: 'Thou benignant Smile,

Mellowing the countenance of Eternity!
Oft on thy works I gazed: on very thee
I gaze at last. O falsely famed to dwell
Withdrawn into thy towering citadel
In most remote austerity of brow!
Ev'n thus did I, too, image thee ere now—
A clifflike, steep Perfection. At this hour,
Seeing thee as thou art, in blandest power
Accessible as Spring and Morning are,
I will unlatch my breast, I will unbar
This heart of mine, I will let leap unpent
The Thought that hungered for enfranchisement,
Prisoned while many an age hath ebbed and gone!
Have I thine ear?' And Ormazd said: 'Say on.'

So Ahriman, as one that halts no more,
But with large gesture opes a captive's door,
Thus from his bosom set the bound thought free :
' Ormazd the Radiant ! betwixt thee and me
Shared is the world : in its august design
Everything everywhere is thine or mine :
And throned o'er all that can rejoice or mourn,
We are the lords of Life from bourn to bourn.
But so enclasped,—nay, through their farthest range
Knotted together in a knot so strange
Are our dominions, each with each entoiled
Even from the prime ; so twined, so intercoiled—

Locked in a tanglement so hard to undo—
So wholly intermingled through and through—
Are these our realms; that nowhere within all
Their vastness is one point, however small,
One meanest spot, where thou or I can say:
Here have I absolute and plenary sway,
Complete, unparcelled lordship, kinghood whole;
Here do I reign, sovereign, supreme, and sole.
Rather have mutual thwartings long made sour
Each cup we drank of! And is this, then, Power—
Can this be rule and governance—to bear
Frustration with a meek brow everywhere,

And unto bafflings without end resign
A patient breast? For such thy wont, and mine.
Ever, O Ormazd, thou art foiled by me;
Ever, O Ormazd, I am baulked by thee;
And everywhere in our domains immense
Is balanced Might but grandiose impotence.

Behold, then, this my Scheme, in silence nursed,
In secrecy long pondered, and now first,
Under the calm, grave inquest of thine eye,
Bid to stand naked: the one Scheme whereby
Huge discords shall be goldenly resolved,
And fair and foul cease to be intervolved,

While from a heaven uncobwebbed thou shalt see
These ravelled worlds blaze with simplicity,
The accurst embroilments and rank disarray
Wholly thenceforward swept from life away.
For now my Scheme, my slow-nurtured Design,
Shall forthwith to that cloudless gaze of thine
Be bared. But though it proffers wondrous things,
They are no more than rich imaginings
Till thy command shall make them truth, and give
The charter that empowers a dream to live.
Behold my Project, then! Let thee and me
On a world-boundary now at last agree:

A barrier, so devised as to extend,
With neither a beginning nor an end,
Along a line throughout Creation drawn,
Straight as if Nature's self must then be sawn
In bleeding halves; and let this barrier reach—
Being of impalpable fabric—without breach,
Mid worlds long weary of our clamorous feud,
Upward and downward through infinitude,
Mystically, and therefore, as were meet,
Invisibly; and when 'tis built complete,
All that is on the one side thou shalt make
Thine own for evermore, and I will take
All that is on the other: and thus shall we
Divide with a Divine equality

Betwixt us twain from that time forth the whole
Of Being, and equitably allot its soul
And substance, past contention. Then must these
Rangers of heaven, that with proud scorn of ease
In many a wheeling orbit wander wide,
Quit their old paths for ways as yet untried,
If in their courses they would else transgress
That Confine's subtle ethereal fixedness,
And with disorder beyond remedy mar
Our Scheme. For so must even planet and star
Yield them to change, and to a new-framed sky
Conform, or perish. Meanwhile thou and I

Have but to ordain it, and with lesser
sound
Than of the grass breaking from out
the ground
There shall be fashioned as by secret
hands
That bodiless mystic barrier, till it
stands
Ungross as air and unbeheld as thought,
Cleaving a universe thenceforth dis-
traught
No more with our hoarse conflicts, no
more shamed
By our crude strifes; and it shall be
proclaimed
The everlasting bound, that must
alone
Part thy dominions, Ormazd, from
mine own.
On *that* side of the guarded frontier,
thine
Shall be the only law; on *this* side,
mine.

And *there* let all Good dwell, thy consort, *here*
All Evil live, my spouse. Then without peer
On that side rule thou changeless, I on this :
And if to wield pure sovereignty be bliss,
Bliss shalt thou have and hold, there reigning ! Yea,
There for the first time shalt thou truly sway
Thy princedoms, and with hate be hemmed not round,
And with no harassed and mock crown be crowned.
There for the first time since the birth of things,
Or since the blind and thunderous labourings
Of the unborn world to be brought forth at all,
Shalt thou whose lips have tasted but the gall

Of doubtful empire, slake thee with delight
Of perfect puissance, never-threatened Might,—
None to dispute thy throne, nothing to gnaw
At its deep bulwarks,—greatness without flaw,—
None to make vain thine acts and pluck away
With midnight hand what thou didst plant by day,—
None to oppose thee, nothing to impede,
And thou at last for ever lord indeed.'

He ceased, and looked to Ormazd for some sign,
Legible haply in that brow benign,
Or those calm eyes. But nothing there he read;
And the pure lips of Ormazd simply said,

With suchlike thrift in words as let no trace
Of aught that was more inward haunt his face :
'What thou proposest I will duly weigh,
And duly shalt thou have my Yea or Nay.'

'And who shall bear thy word unto mine ear ?'
Said Ahriman ; 'and by what token clear
Am I to know him sent indeed from thee,
Right across desolate immensity ?
Where in the world-sweep of thy boundless ken
Shall I await his coming ? And O when
Shall I behold him verily at hand,
With thy great message ?' Then did Ormazd stand

Silent, the monstrous silence of the sky
Dwarfed by his own. Fathomless was his eye,
His face the cloister of his thoughts, his head
A still, lone summit. But at length he said :
'No messenger shall bear to thee my word ;
Only from mine own mouth shall it be heard.
Where, dost thou ask ? Here, where we parley now,
My tongue shall speak it. When, demandest thou ?
A hundred thousand years hence, from this hour.'

To Spirits of heavenly or infernal power,
Such as in ancientness are Time's own peers,
Not longer seem a hundred thousand years,

With their dim-moving pomps of life and death,
Than is to us a moment or a breath.
And the dark ancestor of all things vile
Being well content to wait so brief a while,
The rivals parted, pledged to meet once more,
Soon as those few swift ages should be o'er.
To Night's blind heart returned the Spirit of Ill,
Where gloomed his fastness, whence he roams at will
To mar that Good he may not quite destroy.
And he who fashioned Morn and founded Joy
Betook him to a region of the skies
That from the gaze of men is hidden, and lies

Outside the lore that can bewitch our ears
With the proud epic of the stars' careers.
There did the heavenly traveller halt; and there,
Seeming to rest upbuilt on golden air,
Were vast walls, whiter than in storm the foam
Round fear-struck ships; and many a lustrous dome
Rose as the curving bosom of the swan
Above a still lake rises. There, too, shone
Turrets that, mounting firelike, seemed to be
Ravished and lost in a pure ecstasy,
So high they flamed; while near them, luminous mist,
Its hues the marriage of the amethyst
And opal, floated as amid the play
Of plashing fountains floats the rainbowed spray.

And splendour beyond splendour towered, yet all
The glories bounded by that circling wall
Were one miraculous palace that appeared
As if a wizard of the heavens had reared
Its ageless pomps. Never therein had been
Death, or his shadow; and with dazzling sheen,
Gateways through which no evil thing might fare
Blazed around Ormazd as he entered there.
For this was his far dwelling, which decay
Touched not, and tarnish visited not; and they
Who had kept solemn watch and sleepless ward,
Flung wide its portals to receive their lord.

Gorgeous the web of wonder that is spun
Out of the spilth and offcast of the sun;
Glorious the tropic noon's unbridled light;
Glorious the pageant of the arctic night,
That for an hour perchance may half console
The ice-barred voyager hopeless of the Pole.
But nought are all the splendours Earth hath known,
To that which shook, from round the blinding throne
Where Ormazd seated him again on high,
Tempests of radiance to the burnished sky.

And now unto his presence did he call
Three lordly minds, illustrious among all

That compassed him as with strong ramparts : three
Not far below himself in majesty,
Rashnu and Vayu and great Mithra, sons
Of light and might, his seeing and judging ones,
Also his warlike captains from of old :
To whom he failed not straightway to unfold
Ahriman's Scheme, by which that Prince of Pain
Would carve the labyrinthine world in twain,
Parting, as with a barrier none might climb,
All Evil from all Good throughout all time ;
And Ahriman's whole plea did he rehearse
For such a halving of the universe.
They harkened, on each word and tone intent,
Standing before him proudly reverent,

In silence, till their counsel was be-
sought,
When Vayu was the first to unseal his
thought.

'Let me not with a niggard tongue
refuse'
('Twas thus he spake) 'its just, its
rightful dues
To this world-spacious world-remould-
ing Plan,
Born of the cloud-girt mind of Ahri-
man.
Under this Scheme, no more might
fairest Good,
From the infecting touch and neigh-
bourhood
Of Evil, suffer transformation strange,
Take Evil's hues and into Evil
change;
For strict impassable confines being set
'Twixt these that oft in a fell freedom
met,

Such woes would cease for ever. And perchance
Evil itself, lacking the sustenance
It sucks from Good,—denied its banquetings
Mid the lorn ruins of once blissful things,—
Would sicken and fail, pining with countenance wan
For that rich fare it had long feasted on.
But whether Good, shorn of the strength it draws
From hourly battle with Evil's fangs and claws,
And from uncounted clashings, hard to endure,
With the huge monster's dragon armature,
Would flourish or fade, richer or poorer grow,
Rise with new fire, or smoulder lulled and low

And in a barren peace at last abide,—
Of *that*, O Ormazd, thou that stood'st beside
Time at his cradling must forejudge, not we :
Thou who didst know from their nativity
Both Good and Evil, seeing their wars begun,
And ever won and lost, and lost and won.'

Reverberant, vibrant, nor less broad and deep
Than the sea's utterance round the cloven steep,
Was his rich-billowing voice, each cadence grave
Being like the lapse of a sonorous wave
When it withdraws down a resounding shore.
And after his last word, there hovered o'er

That council a brief silence, tremulous
As with expectancy, till Rashnu thus
Put it to flight: 'One only thing is plain.
Not *our* advantage, not *our* weal or gain,
O Ormazd, doth thy foe of foes intend!
What, then, can be his goal, his secret end?
What lurked behind his specious words, when he,
As if by veriest chance encountering thee
Amid the heavens, poured forth the Scheme which thou
Bid'st us consider? Is it that he now
Foresees his empire slowly dwindling, thine
Greatening, and seeks to avert by this design

That gradual droop of power, that
piecemeal fall,
And long, inglorious fading, which of all
Dreary vicissitude is the dreariest
known,
To one that sits upon a haughty
throne ? '

So asked the noon-bright Spirit, and when he ceased
To speak, although no tongue replied, at least
Faces made answer ; and in speech to the eye
His fellow counsellors there standing nigh
Uttered what seemed not an uncertain Yea.
Then spake outright the lordliest child of day ;
He in whom met, and nobly did agree,
Resplendent strength and mastering suavity ;

He at whose footfall, when he roamed abroad,
The heavens themselves were stilled and hushed and awed,
Hearing the golden thunder of his tread;
Great Mithra. 'First, let me declare,' he said,
'How full, how perfect is mine own assent
To all that hath from lips more eloquent
Most justly flowed. Like Vayu, loth am I
With a mean stint to grudge and half deny
Fit and due praise to a Project, to a Scheme,
Which, were it proved but a vain-builded dream,
Would none the less reveal, if nought beside,
A dauntless Dreamer: being a vision wide

As the mind's farthest outstretch: wanting not
Its lures, its beckon, its promises of what
Ev'n the all-coveting hand of Hope might well
Have lacked the greed to crave. But truth to tell,
I also must like Rashnu cry Beware!
For it is warrior's wisdom, whensoe'er
A foe seems friendliest, to set double guard,
And at an enemy's gift look long and hard.
Now 'tis exceeding sure, that till we know
Whether thyself, O Ormazd, or thy foe
Already wield o'er life the ampler power,
And in these clangorous worlds at each loud hour

Already govern the more vast domain,
We know not whether 'twere thy loss
or gain
To embrace a Project, fix and ratify
Beyond revokement a Design, whereby
The Dark One would in breadth of
empire be
Thy changeless Equal everlastingly,
And thine own puissance an arrested
tide,
Standing magnificently petrified.
Send therefore to each haunt and
dwelling-place
Of Mind—each tenanted orb that rides
in Space—
Each populous busy star that sails
upbuoyed,
Eager and ardent on the torpid
Void—
Send to all seats of life, and through
the whole
Compass and circuit of that world of
soul

That in a fast enmeshment without end
Deep amidst worlds of clay is woven—send
Unseen and noiseless watchers, searchers, spies,
A myriad listening ears and probing eyes,
And bid them bring thee word from everywhere
Of how thine enemy's strength and thine compare;
In what sphere *thou* prevailest; in what zone
And tract of Being *his* might o'ertops thine own;
What wavering region of vext ebb and flow
Now hails *thee* paramount and anon thy foe.
In brief, from wheresoever living thing
Abides, let thine intelligencers bring

Knowledge that, summed into one boundless ray,
Shall show forth clear how thou dost stand to-day,
Measured against thine adversary; and so,
In that enormous torchflare, we shall know
Whether 'twill profit *thee* or him alone,
Who at the heart of darkness hath his throne,
If thou, unto his Scheme consenting, cast
Off and make null and quite tread out the Past,
Bartering this variable and fluctuant sway—
Surge and subsidence, crescence and decay—
For an unchanging Realm, within whose pale
Nowhere shalt thou have reason to bewail

Evil triumphant, and its arms made proud
With trophy and spoil; or to rejoice aloud
At its abjection, and its flight in fear
Before the gleaming of a dawn-tipt spear.'

Such were his words; and now, in speech that fell
From where no shadow of untruth might dwell,
Ormazd's elect and faithful had outpoured
Freely their thought, which in their breasts to hoard
Had been ignoblest service; and the three,
For their oft-proved and spotless fealty,
Received the thanks of that enthroned and crowned
Benignance. Then, from where the glory around

His presence like the soul of dayspring
burned,
They to a thousand radiant tasks re-
turned.

And Ormazd did as Mithra coun-
selled. First
Recalling hosts that had been long
dispersed
On divers errands, diligent spirits and
true,
He formed them into bands and squad-
rons new,
And with new mandate sent them
everywhere
Among the speedful, spurring worlds ;
and there,
Wherever the dim lifeseed had been
sown
In quickened soil, or on waste foam or
stone ;

Wherever aught had breath, and did beget
Offspring, and wither and die; and chiefliest yet,
Wherever creatures born, not quite in vain,
To a broad estate of pleasure and of pain,
Large hereditaments of bliss and woe—
Wherever such a race, emerging slow,
Had risen in honour and shame and love and lust
Out of the pregnant and parturient dust,
There did those secret emissaries engage
In a profound, a solemn espionage.
None saw them; yet among the quick and dead
Daily they moved, with a reposeless tread,

And they became a presence inter-
wreathed
With all that was ; by everything that
breathed
Felt like a vague commotion, like a
breeze
Furtive in underwoods where forest
trees
Stand pensive. And with questing
eyes and ears
They, traversing the divers peopled
spheres,
Passed to and fro ; the mortals dwell-
ing there
Being oft obscurely on a sudden
aware
Of something which had opened not
their doors,
And had no step that sounded on their
floors,
But fainter than a rustle or a sigh
Had glided in, and like a waft gone
by.

And ages came and went, with pauseless pace
And trampling onsweep, till the very face
Of heaven was here and there by slow degrees
Being changed! Young planets, the shy novices
Of Night, appeared beside old palsied ones,
Their joyless kin; while certain fervid suns
Grew senile, and with no more force to spend
Doted decrepit, nearing their lone end:
And sometimes, as from fires that blanch and char,
There fell the ashes of a ruined star.
And still did the unslumbering searchers ply
Their task; and not till they had heard pass by,

Mid voices as of cloud-clad charioteers,
The thunderous wheels of ninety thousand years,
Did they return, and unto Ormazd bring
The heaped fruit of their worldwide harvesting.

Then came the lesser, lighter labour —though
This, too, was a prodigious toil—of so
Ordering and setting forth in due array
The piled and boundless-seeming knowledge they
Had reaped, that Ormazd at a glance might see
The range and scope of his own sovereignty,
Measured against the empire of his foe.
And many an age had yet to come and go,

That as it fleeted found that toil's last stage
Still distant: many a shadowy-trailing age,
When Man may in his long slow dawn have been,
And round him forms that mid this haunt terrene
Succeeded stranger shapes, once monstrously
Got of the dalliance of the Earth and Sea.
But the huge labours were at length complete;
The garnered knowledge was in order meet
Ranged and disposed; the task was perfected;
And Ormazd, seeing as in a chart outspread
His own and his fell rival's power, could view
These with exactness, and now verily knew

Which was the greater: whereupon he cast
Falterings behind him, and stood founded fast
In a resolve that might not change or fade,
Touching the answer that must soon be made,
At the appointed place and destined day,
To Ahriman—the doomful Yea or Nay.

For now that day drew near, and peaklike rose
Out of the plains of time—the day when those
First mighty forefathers of Good and Ill
Must indeed meet once more, and so fulfil
Their mutual pledge, or both for ever stand
Alike forsworn. And ere it loomed at hand,

Ormazd together called, besides the Three
Nighest himself in splendour and majesty,
Thrice three of less renown; and on each one
Bestowing words of cheer and benison,
He to the twelve made known his whole intent.
And at a sign they left him, and he went
From out his lofty-towered abiding-place,
And he looked down o'er the abysm of Space,
He whom its deeps were powerless to appal.
O'er Nothingness, most awsome thing of all,
There looked he down; and halted on its verge,
Somewhat as on a rock above the surge

A fearless swimmer a moment halts, ere he
With headlong leap commits him to the sea.
Then from the towers and courts and domes that glowed
Around his innermost divine abode—
The outskirts of that Light which was his throne—
Ormazd upon the skies went forth alone,
There, for the second time, and for the last,
To meet the Saddener of the World. He passed
By many a massy star, matched with whose girth
Puny indeed were this our boastful Earth,
And onward without tarrying or delay,
Right across many a planet's ancient way,

His own being no such curving course, he fared.
The ever fevered comet as it flared
With violent inroad through the heavens, and raced
Athwart Creation, he that knew not haste
Serenely in its hot flight overtook
And far outsped. As one that fords a brook
In a mere journey o'er vale and wold, he crossed
The madding meteor torrent, that seemed lost
And aimless, doomed to chase in dizzy sky
Its own self round the sun. At times his eye
Saw War beside his pathway, cosmic strife
As of a new world crashing into life

Through welter and rage and the loud splintering
Of old worlds' bones. But oft, where breathing thing
Or living voice had never sought to intrude
On the cold, blank, tremendous quietude,
He swept through utter Calms that well might be
Likened to the immense serenity
And infinite composure of the dead :
Kingdoms that Silence hath inherited
From Silence ; and mid these he came to where
His adversary awaited him, for there,
True to the hour and to the place of tryst,
Was Ahriman, his dread antagonist.

And Ormazd with a soaring voice cried : ' Lo,
I am come to pay thee that which I do owe—

Gratitude, gratitude!' A joyful gleam
Lit the drear face of Evil. 'Then my Scheme
Hath in thine eyes found favour?' But full soon
The gleam departed, Ormazd saying: 'The boon
For which I thank thee and could almost bless
The giver of a gift so measureless,
Is the new knowledge, full and sure, of how
Thy power and mine compare, and whether thou
Or I be mightier. Unto thee my debt
Is boundless: without *thee*, not even yet
That knowledge had been mine, and thou hast well
Earned richest thanks.' Ahriman's countenance fell.

'I knew that thou hadst sent forth everywhere
Thy searchers, gatherers, scouts, and spies, and ne'er
Sought I to foil their quest, nor once have laid
Across their path a hindrance.' Ormazd paid
No heed, but unregardful thus spake on:
'O oft did I in yonder ages gone
Toil with misgiving and with doubt, nor knew
Whether 'twas mine own realm or thine that grew
In lasting spaciousness, or whether both
Stood without movement, without change or growth,
Or rise or fall. And ever labouring still,
I was as one that climbs an endless hill,

And oft I bore a heavy, a secret load,
And lacked the joy that I myself bestowed.
But now I know that when thou met'st me first,
Thinking to snare me with thy guile accurst,
Already had thy feet begun to slide
Ev'n then from power. Already had the tide
Against thee turned: thenceforth the flow was mine,
Thine the loathed ebb. And though thy sure decline
Was hardly as yet a thing to itself confessed,
Already somewhat below peak and crest
Thou stood'st, and wert each morrow fall'n away
A little—a little—from height of yesterday.'

'Thy words are false,' cried Ahriman, 'and thou
Erelong shalt learn that never even now
Have I put forth the full might of mine arm
Against thee; and with tremors of alarm
Shalt thou look on hereafter, while I sow
With dreadful largesse the long-hoarded woe.
For whatsoever thou dost most abhor—
Famine and pestilence and hate and war,
And new-minted diseases worse than death—
These in thrice ampler bounty with my breath
Will I strew wide, wherever mortals live
Their life fantastical and fugitive.'

'And from all this,' said Ormazd,
'shall pure fruit
Upgrow, and odorously will I transmute
To loveliest bloom thy gifts of deadliest bane.
For now henceforth I wax and thou dost wane,
I broaden and thou shrinkest; and at length,
With ever leaping heart and freshening strength,
Joyous I toil, knowing that day by day
Somewhat art thou for ever feebler; yea,
Knowing as happiest truth that ev'n were I
Not indestructible, but born to die
Like Gods that palely perish, making room
For younger Gods,—that ev'n were it my doom

Thus at the feet of conquering Death to bow,
And my chief tasks yet unperformed, and thou
Neither destroyed nor vanquished,—none the less
Stablisht secure in everlastingness
Were this my kingdom, my fair realm of Good;
But thine own realm of Evil, that withstood
So long my assault, and seemed in glory and state
Built above dread of fall, shall soon or late
With pangs of ebbing power, with shudderings vast,
Be o'ertaken and amazed; and haply at last
It shall be broken asunder in ruin extreme,
Scattered as shards and the ashes of a dream,

And thou, or some like heritor of thy
throne,
Under its mountainous dust lie hurled
and prone.'

So Ormazd spake. But his terrific
foe
In boundless rage was silent, and as
though
Somewhat abashed by that pure
strength and grace,
Did turn away the tempest of his
face.
Out of him rose a twilight dim and
dire,
The clouds and column'd vapours of
his ire
Spreading their dusk afar. Half hid
with these
He stood, while, swirled as in mad
vortices
Above him, an innumerable swarm
Of horrors without lineament or form

Circled aloft and blindly eddying spun,
Black as a flight of crows against the sun.
And he, by that foul brood attended, passed
Downward through skies that his mere frown o'ercast,
Betaking him in fury and in shame
Back to those holds of midnight whence he came.

OTHER POEMS

AMERICANS, HAIL!

Frank offspring of that all-adventuring land,
Where, in the petty fray of Lexington,
Thrice fifty summers down the wondrous Past,
Began no less a duel than of Night
And Morning, that was world-watched eight loud years,
Till Morning triumphed, and the watchers knew
America's soil and soul for ever free:
O if you fight as well upon our side
As once you fought against us, how can then
This cause, which is your own and ours and Man's,
Do aught but conquer? You are come to us
Full of the strong wine of your Western air,

Full of the marrow and the sap of life,
Full of the tingle of youth and maiden valour.
You come as Spring comes to the winter fields
When she has hovered long betwixt 'I will'
And many a coy 'I will not'; for even so
You hovered, halting betwixt 'Yea' and 'Nay'—
Then thundered 'Yea' and hurled your doubts afar.
And not more beautiful upon the mountains
Were ever yet the feet of him that brought
Glad tidings, than your prows upon the sea.

Fresh and untired, you find this host of ours

Worn with the burden and stress of
fight and toil:
A host, though but of yesterday's
begetting,
Already, in blind, deaf hurricane of
battle,
Neither ill tried nor proven an ill match
For foes that in their nursery lisped of
arms:
A host proud of your great copartner-
ship,
Proud of their strong new brothers in
the sword—
That just, that holy, that benignant
sword
Whose purpose and whose goal are
peace: a host
Famously captained by such chiefs of
war
As well might seem the very topmost
reach
Of God's own happy art in making
men.

And yet, not to the heroes, fighting there
On strangers' soil—or underneath it laid—
Not to the brave that face yon storms of fire,
Be all the laurel, all the glory and praise!
Here, too, is greatness; here are heads grown grey
In council, not yet dreaming of repose;
Here are the athletes of debate, and here
The brains that are the lamps without whose light
Armies would grope and stumble, and noblest prowess
With a waste splendour dazzle a fruitless field.
Here also, his hot thirst for toil unslaked,
The sinews of his lithe mind unrelaxed,

Is he, our Empire's leader: he who
set
The wheels of the machine of victory
Whirring and spinning throughout all
this isle,
Till Britain hummed as one great mill
of war:
A man, no wraith or shadow; a live
man,
Loathed by the spectres and the
counterfeits;
A man as human as your Lincoln was,
Not muffled up in formula and phrase,
With palisaded spirit, but giving us
Access and entrance to his hopes and
fears,
And in companionship of glorious
hazard
Bearing us with him, while he treads
a road
Built like a causeway across flaming
Hell;
Himself a flame of ardour and resolve,

Beset by all the tempests, but unquenched,
Being used to blasts, and native to the storm,
And thriving on the thunder from his prime.

Ours were the shame, if having such a leader
We proved unworthy at last to be so led,
And lowered the flag of an unshaken will,
And stooped our soul to a stature and a posture
Like theirs who preach a base truck with the foe;
Theirs who desire not to see wickedness
Caught in the noose of its own vile intent,
But hunger for that evil thing, a pact
With evil, nay, a bargain with this pit

That vomiting all putrescence has
o'erflowed
On the sweet earth, a treaty with this
slime;
Who ask that we betray the spirit of
man,
Defraud the world that looked to you
and us
As guardians of its inward patrimony,
And co-trustees of its estate of freedom.
From all such grovelling counsellors,
and from
The craven mood that in a puissant
people
Were the calamity of calamities
And the one desperate ill, a people
itself
Must be its own sole saviour. But O
friends,
'Twixt whom and us the dark, cold,
salt partitions
Avail not now to intercept the heart,
We have an enemy that amid the once

Glad vineyards, orchards, and dear meads of life
Hews at the root of all on earth that flowered!
It flowers no more, for has not he been by?
He found us drowsed and half unsentinelled,
Half unaccoutred and unpanoplied,
Lapt in a human trust of humankind
And dreaming that himself was human too.
Fatal, befooling dream! He spoke indeed
With human organs, gave forth human sounds,
Made human gestures, and his melodists
Had fashioned heretofore high human music,
None fairer and none nobler, and his poets

Had thrilled the world with most per-
human song;
But all his later study and care had
been
To rip from his own breast the human
heart,
And, having rid him of so vain a thing,
To found upon the hideous ghastly
void
The edifice of his thoughts, deeds, and
desires;
As if upon a hollow and a want
There could arise aught 'stablisht to
endure.
And this, this was not all! For where
his heart
Had suffered dread erasure, demons
found
Befitting residence and domicile,
And made that cavern in his breast
their home.
Yonder they camp, thence do they
sally abroad,

And thither from fell foray they return.
These, his foul tenants, these no arms
can slay,
Theirs being a monstrous immortality;
But he o'erthrown, their fort and
citadel
Were fall'n, and lacking that secure
retreat
These Terrors would be terrible no
more.
This, then, O friends and mighty
aiders, this
Must be your task and ours: to level
with earth
That fort, that citadel, that hold
itself,
Where all the trooping fiends find
harbourage
And trysting-place, and couch and
kennel, and whence
In the aghasted eye of the sick day
They make infernal sortie. More than
this

No league of Man can compass: less than this
Would, for ourselves or for our woeful heirs,
Be but damnation a brief while deferred,
At best a little putting off of fate,
At best a little miserable ease,
And then the paying of all the arrears of doom,
Vouched in remorseless audit; then indeed
Ruin and perdition and a world undone.

In that belief, you and ourselves await,
With hope that cannot wholly vanquish fear,
The veiled, tremendous morrow; and yonder stands
Your Nation, watching o'er the sea her sons;

AMERICANS, HAIL!

A Nation whence, as from an orchestra
Suavely controlled, there rises goldenly
Though sternly, with far surge and tidal swell,
Not without sad and wailful underflow,
But mighty in heave of sound, all dissonance hushed,
A new Heroic Symphony of war;
Heard throughout Earth with a grave thankfulness
By such as love great music; and perhaps
Ev'n on an ear divine not wholly lost,
Not utterly unacceptable to Heaven.

December 1917.

THE UNRECONCILED

I

In a crease of the forehead of Antrim,
where Time has written on stone
The tale of the endless debate of the
obstinate land and sea—
Those heirs of magnificent discord,
that just for a season agree
To compose their thunderous quarrel,
but ever at heart are prone
To harp on it night and day in a
moody undertone,
And presently mutter a word that is
dark with wrath and bale,
And rouse from counterfeit sleep their
fell vendetta, and so
Return to the naked hate they were
born in long ago,

Reopen the wrangle of ages, resume
the dear dispute,
The controversy eternal that bears but
death for fruit,
As well from of old these haughty, im-
placable brawlers know ;—
In a crease of the forehead of Antrim,
where Time has written that
tale,
I have found me a place that surely is
musing on ancient woe,
And remembers in dreams the tread of
the midnight foot of Doom :
A place where even the candours of
noon seem sinister things :
And there I have heard the ocean
recitative roll and boom,
The monotonous ocean soliloquy
rumble morose and low ;
The obscure beginning of storm, like a
rustle of huddled wings ;
The stroke of the great sea-hammer,
awaking with blow on blow

In the cavernous land such outcry as
iron from iron wrings;
The clang of the shock of the waters
that butted with taurine roar
Against fallen Dunseveric, once the
abode of vengeful Kings;
And the blind, mad panic in heaven
when eastward the hurricane tore
By the marge where lorn Templastra
dejected ponders, and o'er
That fantasy, wild Ballintoy, on the
steeps in the lee of Bengore.

II

And listening there to the sound of
contention fierce, that began
'Mid the Earth's primeval travail, ere
God had dreamed of Man—
Contention ordained to abide when
Man within dust and stone
Shall haply have been forgotten by all
but God alone—

THE UNRECONCILED

I have heard, as a thing far off, the voice that is yet as nigh
As the duel of land and sea, beneath the impartial sky;
A richer voice than theirs, and of deep, all-human tone;
Pulsating, vibrating, plangent, a voice we dare not fly:
The voice of Ireland's self, for ever about our door;
The voice that beats as a billow on us that are the shore.

III

O Ireland, easeless Ireland, how oft like yonder tide
Thy soul has arisen, all foam, to break on the crags in spray!
And ever the crags endured, and the bright spray gleaming died,
And ever as brief iridescence did Fortune glimmer away.

But to-day shall it still be the same? Thy heart's abounding dower
And the wealth of thy spirit, are these to be spent like a thunder-shower?
Behold, after weary ages of fever and barren pain,
A cause that is worth thy passion, a sword that deserves thy hand!
O take them and make them thine. 'Tis the world's transcendent hour.
'Tis the day of the falling of barriers, and out on the western main
The interdicts of Ocean themselves are annulled and vain,
For the daughter of many races, that long was wont to tower
As the great lone Alp among nations, serene in mateless power,
At last, her human bosom prevailing, comes to stand

With her kindred, side by side, with her lovers, heart by heart;
And is it thy choice at this hour to hold thee coldly apart,
To watch from without in the time of the leaping of chasms unspanned,
When glimpsed amid clouds are the ways of the World-Deviser, who planned
How Good shall be born of Evil and suckled on Evil's breast—
In the time of the drawing together of continents, east and west,
In the morn of the stormy bridal of far-cleft land and land,
When the hemispheres brook no longer their soulless bars unblest?

IV

Ah, words without hope of fruitage, like seed on the breakers flung!
But at least I have told my thought, in faithful if idle speech,

That comes not of rage or hatred, and
only of love is sprung.
And now I will hold my peace, I will
husband now my tongue,
I will learn of whatever is voiceless
whatever it has to teach.
The spent tide flags and recoils. Like
gifts unused and waste
Is the many-tinted seaweed that strews
the Atlantic beach.
I will climb the track to westward,
where bards of old have paced,
Whose songs are asleep by cromlech
and cairn and haunted mound.
I will follow the path that leads
to the Way of the Giants,
around
By the Amphitheatre vast, with its
tiers of cliff, where rise
The column'd shafts of basalt like
organ-pipes to the skies,
Outrolling a fugal silence, involved,
impassioned, profound.

'Tis the path that gropes and crawls
on the lean rock's wasted side,
Where nightly the Giant's Loom by
invisible hands is plied.
And east and west are the caverns,
their dark roofs arched and
groined,
The chambers and vaulted dungeons
and monstrous crypts of the sea :
And pillars, fallen and prostrate, from
mighty façades disjoined—
Released, but in utter abjection, un-
bound, but vainly free ;
And desolate ruined holds of many a
chief and King ;
And the mastersong of disunion that
earth and ocean sing ;
And large and bold on the headlands
the manuscript of Time ;
And coiled with the roots of the world,
where Life thrusts up like a tree,
The Powers that rive and sunder, un-
moved by appeal or plea ;

THE UNRECONCILED

The Powers that shatter with discord
what else were a golden chime;
The Estrangeing Ones, the dividers,
the hewers in twain from the
prime;
The Unmakers and Destroyers, what-
ever their names may be.

September 1917.

THE FORESIGHT OF THE BLIND

THE great, strange, conquering legends puissant still
As in the Middle Age whence they arose,
Which are they? Sovereign above all are those
Of Faust's dread bargain with the Spirit of Ill,
And of that Knight who, taking long his fill
Of bliss with Venus, earned him longer woes!
And from the Kingdom of our living foes
Came both these dreams, mighty to haunt and thrill,
And each the tale of a lost soul: as though

THE FORESIGHT OF THE BLIND

Germania unawares had prophesied
Of her own state and fate on Earth, that sees,
Dark with self-doom, against a fiery glow,
The lost soul of a nation, wandering wide
Like lone Ahasuerus, without ease.

February 1918.

SONG

THE WARRIOR LOVER

When War's red tempest shall depart,
That long hath sundered me
From those sweet precincts of thy heart
And all that heaven of thee;
If I return from where they rest
Whom battle's scythe hath mown,
Then in the fragrance of thy breast
I 'll live for love alone.

But if, where warstorms wildest roll,
My life for *her* I yield—
That other empress of my soul,
Who called me to the field—
Though 'twixt you twain, with dying breath,
My homage I 'll divide,
My heart will turn to thee in death,
To claim and clasp its bride.

BEHOLD!

O THOU that with a signal canst control
All seas that roll;
O Thou that with a whisper canst assuage
All winds that rage:
Behold how softer than the human breast
The wild bird's nest!
Behold how calmer than the world of men
The wild beast's den!

March 1918.

TO CERTAIN NEBULAE

Planet and star, and the glory of ancient constellations,
These have surfeit of homage, in songs of a thousand singers :
You, O Nebulae, still, as of old, dwell yonder songless ;
One in Orion's sword-hilt, one in Andromeda's girdle,
One like shadowy foam, where sails a fantastical Argo.
You, mid Arabian cities, and proud Chaldea, and Egypt,
Mighty astronomers, slowly deciphering Heaven's papyrus,
Oft, no doubt, have watched, in a world all colour and fruitage,
Balsam, sultry aroma, and odorous vivid abundance,

Palm, oleander and cedar, acanthus
and lotus and laurel,
Foliage, vintage, plumage, honey and
delicate unguents,
Attar and spices and myrrh. And in
many a nearer region
Many a wandering gaze hath known
your places of ambush,
High above dreams, above tears!
But never a golden greeting
Thither ascends, through space,
through coldly inhuman vast-
ness,
Out of the mouth of a poet, in magical
human numbers.
You, then, far across night, and im-
mense, magnificent silence,
Intricate cosmic coil, and the nodes of
entangled orbits,
Let me salute, O pallid, unsplendid
things, amid splendour
Hovering ever obscure, amid prideful
lustre unprideful:

TO CERTAIN NEBULAE

You that to vague, light ken seem only
as bodiless auras,
Breath of a hundred stars ; but rather
appear unto wisdom
Fringes and shreds of the Veil, through
which, at the Earth's great
moments,
Flashes of God break forth, in the hour
of the smiting of Evil ;
Day of the clang of the axe upon trees
that bore but poison ;
Day of the mortal throes of iniquitous
perishing empires ;
When, upon brows discrowned, the
erasing extinguishing thunders
Fall, and the throne of the cruel is
tossed as a leaf in the whirlwind.

November 1918.

VERSES

To Henry C. Montgomery, Esq., of Belfast. Written near Windermere.

Good friend and true, who, for the gifts and knowledge
That stead you well amid the clang and strife,
Are less in debt to yonder younger College
Than to the University of Life:

Take, at this time that opens the heart's fountains,
Take, at this Yuletide, from across the seas,
The greetings of the meres and of the mountains,
And of your friends who are the guests of these.

Nay, see my rhyme, that must not halt or tarry,
Flits through the snowstorm like a battered dove,
My little firstborn daughter bids it carry,
To her big, bearded playfellow, her love.

Wild roars the blizzard. Wilder tempest rages
In Man's fierce breast, and hides from the world's eye
The truthtellers and lightgivers and sages
That live when hatred and when fury die.

In this ill day, what good wish shall I send you ?
Vain, when our fate yet hangs in quivering doubt,
To ask that all felicity attend you,
And bid you to forget the woe without!

I can but pray that in some happier
morrow,
You, and we also, gazing from afar,
May look back on this vast, life-blinding sorrow
As on the occultation of a star,—

A fixed star, briefly hidden by the
passing
Of a reposeless orb of bloodred glow:
Then bursting forth, where Night's
bright hosts were massing,
To pour its glory undimmed, as long
ago.

Christmas 1917.

THE SCROLL OF LIFE

LIFE seems a scroll, not so much darkly writ
As ill transcribed; and he who pores on it
Must, like a painful scholiast, thread perplext
The thorny thicket of a mangled text.

But with it wov'n is many a quoted line,—
The cryptic prose breaks into verse divine;
And in strange wafts the painful scholiast hears
Hexameters of the Iliad of the Spheres.

POWER AND CHARM

A cot was ours, lone on a wooded fell
That gazed into a fairy mere renowned.
Dark mountains on our right hand
camped around;
Green, on our left, were copse and
ferny dell.
Thus betwixt Power and Charm we
abode; and well
Loved we the brows of Power, with
silence crowned;
Yet many a time, when awsomely
they frowned,
To Charm we turned, with Charm,
with Charm to dwell.

So have I turned, when overbrooded
long
By that great star-familiar peak
austere,

My Milton's Sinai-Helicon divine,
To some far earthlier singer's earth-
sweet song :
A song frail as the windflower, and as
dear,
With no more purpose than the
eglantine.

THE INNERMOST CAVERN

The unsailed, the unentered cavern,
The still ungazed upon!
No light but the sea-phosphorescence
Amidst its night hath shone.

Then only it wakes from slumber,
Whenever the visiting gleam
Of the fairy fire of the Ocean
Illumes its secret dream.

For it dreams of space without confines,
Of vastness around and above;
And it waits like the heart of a maiden,
That waits to be lit by love.

TOIL

Life is a workshop and a temple as
well,
Where the great toilers—so their annals
tell—
To Justice, Truth, and Love paid
worship, knowing
Life was a workshop and a temple as
well.

Life is a workshop and a palace
both.
Nature, that ever labours without
sloth,
Nature herself in beauty and grace
hath taught us
Life is a workshop and a palace
both.

O be it ours, while hate and feud are rife,
To keep far off from this our land the strife
That yonder makes a wreck of Man's own dwelling,
His wondrous workshop, temple and palace, Life.

THE EARTH'S DESIRE

WHEN a sigh as of abdication is wrung from lordly things
By the rumour of crumbling pride that the eve of autumn brings ;

When the troubled splendours come, and the glad perfections go,
Amid flitting of vagabond tempest irresolute to and fro ;

' Ask, ask thou a boon,' say the Heavens to the wistful Earth ; but in vain
She asks for the bliss of the Rose, and the pomp of the Nightingale's pain.

WHITHER AFAR?

In light, in night, in twilight,
I sought—I sought for Thee!
But *my* light, was it *Thy* light?
I sought, and nought could see.

I strove by inward eyesight
To gaze on things to be:
But *my* sight, was it *Thy* sight?
I gazed, and nought could see.

Along Thy starlit highway
Thou lead'st me, bound or free!
If *my* way, then, be *Thy* way,
O whither lead'st Thou me?

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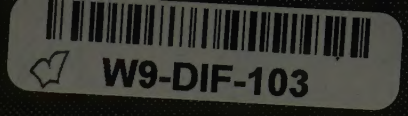
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